

Linda Clair
Seven-day Meditation Retreat
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File 2c – Sunday afternoon discussion session

Question: Did you find in your experience when you were practicing that you became stronger through persistence over time?

Linda: Yes. But the strength appeared in ways that surprised me a bit. Sometimes I would feel very, very vulnerable and I realised later that that was a sign of becoming stronger; not being scared to expose myself. So it wasn't always like I became strong, "Okay, I'm going to sit here! I'm going to sit here forever." At times just being able to cry without feeling that I was being weak or anything like that – I felt stronger through that. So it was in different ways. And yes, I sat longer and longer and I became more and more determined but there were times when of course I wanted to give up too. Do you feel stronger?

Question: Yes, maybe in different ways like you're saying.

Linda: How are you feeling today?

Question: Good. I've felt a little bit like I'm in a slumber or something. I've slept a lot, really deeply. I've been sleeping between sits and when the alarm goes I go, "What's going on? Have I slept all day," and I have to work out what time it is. In the sits I've become clearer but there's this quality of – not a haze – like I'm asleep or something.

Linda: Someone else said that too. It's not a sleep. And particularly the first day you'll feel like that. A lot of people – as I'm looking around at everyone, they're a bit... (Laughing) It's a bit of a shock coming into a situation like this and you can tend to feel like this, just settling in for the first day or two. I always remind people that the first day or two, or usually the first 24 hours is a settling in period. Then usually by tomorrow you'll start to feel differently.

When I was in Newbury, the first day I asked how many people wanted to go home because a few people seemed quite restless and quite a few people put their hands up. (Laughing) Nobody ended up going home but the first day you're going, "What's going on? What is this? Why am I here," and all that stuff. So just let yourself settle in. The hazy feeling is quite normal and you'll start differently as you go on.

Question: This morning you spoke about the body and time. I don't think I understood what you meant?

Linda: The body and time? Do you remember what I said?

Question: No. It was basically that there would be no time for the body while it was subjected to aging.

Linda: I think I said the body – whatever state you're in – is subject to aging, subject to relative time. But it is possible while you're still in the body to be in this state that is timeless, not thinking. Thinking creates this illusion that we're in this progression of time because every time you think, you pretend that you're not here and you go into your own personal past. It's actually a movement away from now. So if you see "now" as this straight line – this is now and everything happens within this – as soon as you start to think, you move away from where you really are – you're sitting here in your body, that's a fact. Each time you start to think you start to pretend that you're not actually here, that you're in the past. And even if you think you're thinking about the future, it's all related to something that you've already experienced, that has already happened, something in your personal past. As you come more and more into your body – into here – even though your body is not reality, you start to realise that time is an illusion because it's just pretending that you're not here right now. Does that make any sort of sense? No? (Laughing)

Question: How is the body not reality?

Linda: Reality is, and it always is. It never begins or ends whereas this body does actually end at one time; it dies. You could say it turns into energy but the body changes and then dies whereas reality is now. And amazingly enough, this body, this organism can contain now – the incredible energy of now – while still being this physical organism subject to time. Don't try and understand it because the mind can't because the mind is not real. So anything that comes and goes is not reality. And the only thing that doesn't, is now, right now. But each time you think, you can't be here right now. You can't think of now because as soon as you do you've gone into time; what you see as the past and the future. Ask me another question? (Maybe later.) I don't know if I've expressed it really clearly. (Laughing)

Everything happens now. But when we think we pretend that something happened in the past whereas everything is happening now. And when you're totally here now there's no time to think. There's no separation.

Question: Slightly related to that, in the settling-in period I've been thinking and I'm more and more clear that all my thinking in the last few months and maybe forever, but at least in this retreat has been all about, "How am I doing? Am I more aware? Am I more grounded? Less grounded? Is my pain in the body from my mind or is it actually in my body?" So it's always about me. It hasn't been about people except maybe how people see me. It's just been constantly trying to work out if I'm doing okay or if I'm not, and if not, how to fix that. It's not a very comfortable thing to spend your time obsessed with that but I've sort of stopped fighting it. So I don't feel as uncomfortable at this stage of the retreat as past retreats. It feels more accepting of the fact that shit comes up; it's just going to be there... And I can stick with the process when I can, and when I can't, I can't. And let the thoughts that are generated – let them go – and let the secondary judgment go. I was a bit surprised that that sort of went this morning.

Linda: So that's more quickly than usual?

Question: Yes, it's not that I feel great or anything. (Laughter) The thoughts still come up, "What am I doing here." But usually there's also a quagmire of, "You shouldn't be thinking that. It's a missed opportunity." It's all about referring to the past.

Linda: Your past.

Question: Yes, some sort of standard or reference to some standard that I've got hidden in my mind that I'm measuring against all the time.

Linda: And that's what drives you crazy – the judgments. And every thought is a judgment of some kind. Every thought is related to you; even if it seems related to something else, it's all to do with you. And that's what drove me crazy. But it's true – the first day of a retreat is a settling-in for everyone – for me included. You will question why you're here, at times. But the faster you can settle in, then you can get into the real suffering. 😊 (Laughter)

Question: This is just the superficial suffering. 😊

Linda: Yes – you arrive; you sort of looked forward to it or you might have been a bit anxious; you want certain things to happen; you don't want to waste your time; you want to know why you're here. All this stuff is churning away and then you start to be here a bit more and ground a bit more. Then you can get on with it; go on with the work – and it's work. It doesn't mean you don't enjoy the work sometimes – maybe a lot.

Question: I'm looking forward to that. 😊 I expected it to take longer to get over the initial stuff, which is just another expectation not met.

Linda: Again and again you see the pointlessness of thinking. And you need to just see that. Every expectation is proved wrong. There's just no point trying to expect something and work it out and predict anything because you really don't know. Thinking is pretending that you know; that you can prepare something and it's going to be like this and that makes you feel more secure. But you don't know what's going to happen – you really don't. When the fear goes you stop trying to predict – whatever happens, happens. It's not that you don't care but you don't try and feel secure all the time. There's no need for that security when there's no fear. And there's no security, of course, in thinking.

So this is preparing yourself for your death really, because you can't think yourself out of death. 😊 Probably some people do try. (Laughing) They're dying and go, "No, no I don't want to be dying," but. There's nothing morbid in that. This is an amazing thing to do while you're still in the body; to not be scared of your own death. Which doesn't mean you want to die, of course. But you get that out of the way and you start living – like, really living.

Have you been sitting at home?

Question: Mostly, yes – I lost a bit determination but – probably four-five times a week. Keeping in touch, but it has felt that since the last Adelaide weekend it's felt hard and I've felt a bit spacey and unable to make decisions and not knowing which way to turn; any decisions have been very, very hard to make. It's been related to the fear of making a choice; seeing a lot of fear. Seeing that my life is full of over-thinking and seeing the fear that drives that.

Linda: Good. It is good. And you're not always going to feel inspired. There are going to be times when it's harder than others. And usually you leave a retreat and feel, "Oh wow! I'm going to get into it," and it gradually wanes, until the next one. I suppose that's why people have ashrams and

monasteries; to try to keep that motivation going, that energy going. But you've also got to learn to stand on your own two feet.

Question: You've mentioned determination quite a few times and I've heard it in relation to your story about why you started to meditate. Do you think that's a prerequisite or do you think just the practice is adequate?

Linda: Well, to keep doing the practice you need to be determined.

Question: Not necessarily.

Linda: What sort of history have you got?

Question: I meditate with the breath but I haven't done any Zen meditation before or looked into it. I've done a couple of ten-day Vipassana retreats. I'm still finding my preferred method but generally I meditate with the breath and sometimes I might listen to a recording and go with a guided meditation.

Linda: Do you meditate with a group at all? (No.) How are you finding sitting with everyone here? But I suppose it's only the first day.

Question: Good. It's got a very lovely feeling about. I'm finding it challenging. I fell asleep constantly the last hour. I found it very hard to stay alert and I'm feeling pretty tired. I think I'm disciplined enough to do it and to keep with it but I don't feel I have an enormous amount of determination.

Linda: Well, the determination develops. For me it developed out of desperation because as L. was saying, I just realised everything was about me. I got sick of feeling all this fear. Judging myself and judging everyone else drove me crazy. And it was true; I wasn't really concerned about anyone else – I was only concerned about me. I hated that but it was still all about me. And most of the time during my practice, I wasn't doing it for anyone else – it was for me. So you can use that self-obsession to make yourself more determined and to keep going.

Initially, often, when you start meditating you can go through this period where it's amazing and you feel, "Oh wow, this is incredible," but then you start getting down into the deeper stuff that starts arising and that's when it starts to get harder. People don't talk about that much. They talk more about, "It's supposed to be relaxing. It's supposed to be calming, and if you don't feel calm you're not meditating properly." In my experience, of course, it's not true. But you'll get back from this and people will say, "Do you feel really calm, rested," and you go, "No." (Laughing)

Question: So as long as you just continue sitting, you don't necessarily need to have this massive striving and desperation to become enlightened? You might just want to improve yourself.

Linda: I'd say most people deep down would love to be enlightened. If they knew how it felt they would. The reason I'm doing this is I want to make it clear it is possible for anyone who wants it enough. It doesn't always happen straight away. It can creep up on you until, in a way, you haven't got any choice; you've seen enough that you can't pretend it's not there. That's what motivates

you; you can't go back and you don't feel like you're moving forward but all you can do is keep sitting.

That's what motivated me as well as having a few teachers who I knew were realised; I could feel it and I could feel it in my body. And that kept me going because I felt, okay, it is possible while you're still in the body, so maybe it's possible for me. It was one of the things I loved about the Zen practice; they did say that. They didn't say, next lifetime; they said now – it is possible now. And my first teacher as well. He wasn't a Zen teacher but he was very much into that. And he was just an ordinary man; not with thousands of people around. And suddenly I started to realise, "Oh, maybe this is possible for me," and that's what got me really excited.

But starting off, no, I was just sick of how I was and I was really quite bored with my life. Even though it was okay – it was fine outwardly – I felt there must be something else; surely there's something else. So yes, the determination develops. And it comes and goes. It waxes and wanes. Sometimes you feel really inspired and determined. And other times you don't. And there's all this judgment going on, "This is a good sitting; I'm going well. This is a bad sitting; I'm not going so well." So as much as possible, look at that judgment and let it go because that's what affects your determination because you tend to just give up, "Oh, this is hopeless. I can't do it."

Question: Time? There seems to be a common thread among questions and reports. I'm reflecting on what B. said yesterday. Time's a bit funny – in our relationships as we go through this process we can feel a little bit out of sorts. We feel as though we're expected to be a certain way even though we're not like that anymore. As I've walked through this process and time is literally unravelling, things have changed in ways I had never imagined. In subtle ways as well, like I'll pick up a book I used to love and read a few pages and because my sensitivity has changed, that book is meaningless to me and I have to let it go. I no longer feel like writing anymore. As soon as I pick up my pen it feels contrived. It's very difficult to function sometimes. So my question is, as you were going through this process, how to manage to function and how do you manage to function now because it's getting more and more difficult?

Linda: It's good to have some sort of structure in your life. So for me there were times when I would really spend all day doing nothing. I would feel so – I don't know what it was – exhausted? I didn't want to go to sleep but I couldn't do anything. There were times when I did that but it's important not to get too attached to that because you can subtly start to get into it and indulge in it a bit too much and go, "Ah, I can't function. I can't do anything."

The truth is, sometimes I did find it a bit difficult to function. That sounds very exotic to people in a way but really there were other times when I had to. I had kids; I couldn't say, "Get your own dinner." I had to get their dinner and do stuff for them and I had to work. That was actually really good because it forced me out of that "non-functional" state. It was really that I didn't want to have anything much to do with the world sometimes. It was like I was withdrawing from it. So it's really important to stay grounded and that's a big thing about this practice. But yes, there will be times when you do feel like you're not functioning really well but just be careful you don't start to get too attached to that.

And the same can happen post-enlightenment too. You can at times get a bit attached to – especially at first because you spent all your life in this relative state in the world and suddenly you're not it. You can tend to go a bit too far into it before you can come back into balance again

and feel, "I don't want anything to do with this, I just want to retreat," but for a different reason. Now I just function. I am feeling things changing at the moment where, in a strange way, I don't feel – "functional" may not be the word. Caring about what's happening is becoming less. I used to be a very efficient, capable person and that is dropping away. I can see part of that was really wanting to be this very capable, efficient person in the worldly sense. That is sort of going now; I can feel it. So I don't know what's going to happen. But there's a lot of stuff now that I'm not particularly interested in. There's no fear there at all.

There's no fear about surviving and doing anything. I can still survive quite well day to day; that's fine. So there's not that fear there but if someone talks about it, probably fear arises in you because you go, "Oh, I don't want to end up like that. I still want to keep a hold of everything and control everything," whereas you don't really and it gradually, gradually goes. But everything is okay. Everything is much better than it ever was but that trying to control does slip away.

So I'd say with what you're feeling, just be careful that you don't get too much into it and make sure there is a bit of structure in your life. Do you work? (Yes.) ... to keep you grounded. But I function fine. I've just travelled by myself on a plane overseas. I didn't miss any flights.

Question: I'm curious to see how the next couple of days go for myself and us as a group.

Linda: It all changes. During retreat amazing things happen. You start off just trying to settle in and figure out what's going on and then you start giving up doing that and everyone starts to come together and it becomes this mass of people rather than all these individuals. Everyone comes together energetically and everyone is affecting everyone else. By the end you feel very close to each other in a different way to normal; probably more deeply than if having talking, than you normally do with people.

It's interesting because some people here see each other outside of this and other people don't. But as soon as you get together with people who do this there's this instant intimacy that is different to the relationships you might have outside of this – even with your family or your partner. It's like we're all going through something that you can't explain to anyone else outside. I'm not saying that's better or worse or anything; it's just something very different.

Question: And this difficulty of finding my bearings through this process when I'm practicing on my own, it feels easier to manage in a group in the process together.

Linda: Yes, everyone's trying to find their bearing. You realise you're not alone. So that gives you a sort of bearing; just by the fact you realise you're not really alone. You sort of are, in a way, but you're not. So this helps with the isolation that you can tend to feel while you're doing this because most of the world is going the opposite way, going out, looking for stuff outside. And this is looking in.

So yes, things will change over the days.